

ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGICAL COMMISSION

ANNUAL REPORT

for

FISCAL YEAR 2021: JULY 2020 - JUNE 2021

SUMMARY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Fiscal year 2021 marked the 46th anniversary of the formation of the Alexandria Archaeological Commission (AAC). The mission of the AAC is to establish goals and priorities to promote Alexandria Archaeology (AA), encourage volunteerism, and to advise on the preservation and interpretation of Alexandria's extraordinary sites and collections. The key accomplishments over FY 2021 are:

- 1) As part of work to highlight and interpret African American history in Alexandria, the AAC nominated, and was awarded acceptance of the Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery into the National Park Service African American Civil Rights Network.
- 2) Outreach and advocacy for the AAC to be a key stakeholder in the evolution of the "Action Plan for Vibrancy and Sustainability Plan at the Torpedo Factory Art Center" both as a partner in the building's future, the home of the Archaeology Museum and Division, and as a voice for the historical preservation of the 100-year-old building.
- 3) Continued advocacy for waterfront historical projects and initiatives derived from the 2018-2019 Ship Committee recommendations, including the Waterfront Museum Feasibility Study, the documentation and modeling of ship timbers, conservation of waterfront artifacts, and the stabilization/ponding of the timbers.

COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP, ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

As in the past, the AAC is dedicated to *providing guidance and responsive advocacy, assisting in establishing goals and priorities, as well as supporting Alexandria Archaeology staff and ongoing outreach and education to our community*, so that Alexandria Archaeology can continue to be one of the country's most respected, innovative, and leading city archaeology offices. Even with the continuation of the pandemic, the AAC remains active and through their achievements, continues to positively impact and enrich the lives of residents, attract visitors (in person as well as online), and bring national and international attention to Alexandria's discoveries.

Key Accomplishments

AAC Nominates and Gains Admission for Contrabands and Freedman Cemetery Memorial to the National Park Service African American Civil Rights Network

In September 2020, Commission member Seth Tinkham made the motion to nominate the Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery Memorial to the National Park Service African American Civil Rights Network (AACRN) on the grounds that the actions of the soldiers of the USCT (United States Colored Troops) who successfully petitioned in 1864 to have their fellow soldiers reburied with full military honors in the Soldier's Cemetery was an early and powerful act of civil rights. Seth, fellow Commission member Elizabeth Vehmeyer, and the Archaeology Division prepared the nomination with supporting documentation and sought City Council approval in November 2020.

On June 28, 2021, the cemetery was accepted into the AACRN as one of the oldest acts of civil rights and the first in Virginia. This nomination was made with full support from the Alexandria Archaeological Commission, the City Manager, and the City of Alexandria City Council.

On July 24, 2021, over 100 people came together at the cemetery to celebrate and honor the self-emancipated African American men, women, and children who fled to Alexandria during the Civil War. The AAC worked closely with Alexandria Archaeology and the Alexandria Black History Museum to organize the event and invited the public, descendants of those buried in the cemetery, City Council, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, the National Park Service, Shiloh Baptist Church, reenactors from the USCT, the 31st Masonic District, and other stewards of this living memorial.



Participants in the July 24, 2021 Celebration at the Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery Memorial for its inclusion in AACRN.

Outreach and advocacy for Alexandria Archaeological Commission to be a key stakeholder in the evolution of the Torpedo Factory Art Center Vibrancy and Sustainability Plan

At the November 18, 2020, AAC meeting, the “Action Plan for Vibrancy & Sustainability at Torpedo Factory Art Center” was presented to the Commission by Diane Ruggerio. Commission members had several comments and concerns, most notably that there was little to no mention of the Archaeology Museum or offices, or any attribution to the historical nature of the physical building. On December 11, 2020, Commission members, Edward Pulliam and Ralph Rosenbaum attended a Zoom presentation by the Office of the Arts to formally express AAC’s concerns.

A letter from the AAC was sent to City Council (attached) in December 2020, reiterating our concerns and interest in being a key stakeholder in the future development of plans for the TFAC. In addition, Chair Ivy Whitlatch spoke at the February 20, 2021, City Council Legislative Session and received acknowledgement from Councilwoman Jackson and Councilwoman Pepper that Archaeology should be acknowledged as a partner, “not a tenant.”

AAC remains highly focused and determined that Alexandria Archaeology has representation in the both the short and long-term plans for the TFAC. The Alexandria Archaeology Museum and all of the associated outreach programs and exhibits created by the museum team are a significant contributor to the vibrancy and appeal of the TFAC for both visitors and residents. There are facility issues, space issues, staff issues, and long-term upgrade needs that remain a priority within the current Museum, lab and office settings. In addition, the recently funded Waterfront Museum Feasibility Study findings may affect the TFAC. As a significant presence in the TFAC since its inception, we are a key stakeholder.

Continued advocacy for waterfront historical projects and initiatives derived from the 2018-2019 Ship Committee recommendations

Since the work began on EYA’s riverside development site at Robinson Landing on South Union Street, and the Hotel Indigo site before that, archaeologists have uncovered, four ship hull remnants, a rich complex of buildings and artifacts dating from the 18th through 19th centuries, including foundations of homes and businesses of a broad spectrum of free and enslaved Alexandrians from many walks of life. These discoveries have become the core building blocks for engaging the community with their stories and conducting research. Below are a few examples from FY 2021 Alexandria Archaeology’s, waterfront initiatives and research, supported by the AAC.

- Virtual Ship Science lesson for Mount Vernon Community School’s spring break week.
- In conjunction with FOAA, the return of the Archaeology After Dark series, with topics ranging from Dr. Garrett Fesler’s presentation on Nat Turner and the 46 Petitioners in Alexandria to Dr. Benjamin Skolnik’s research of the 1803-1804 logbook of the Schooner Enterprise, which was based in Alexandria.
- Virtual programs about Alexandria’s waterfront for university programs and archaeologic societies, that reach national and international audiences. Most notable was a presentation with the San Luis Obispo County Archaeological Society.
- Collaboration with community partners and Alexandria Black History to put on the Celebrate Juneteenth Along the Waterfront webinar honoring the launch of the African American Heritage Trail. This self-guided trail has garnered local and regional media attention and the StoryMap has been visited more than 7000 times since launch.
(<https://www.alexandriava.gov/historic/info/default.aspx?id=116132>)



Invitation Announcing Juneteenth Event in Partnership with the Alexandria African American Heritage Trail Committee and the Alexandria Black History Museum.

Ongoing Priorities

Strengthen the partnership with the Friends of Alexandria Archaeology (FOAA)

The Friends of Alexandria Archaeology is the engine that drives the volunteers who support Alexandria Archaeology. They are an essential contributor to the success of the division and in FY2021, with increased opportunities through virtual meetings, AAC and FOAA have collaborated on many issues including budget appeal to City management, joint award potential, fund raising opportunities and community involvement with programs such as Archaeology After Dark. It is the intent of the AAC to continue to find additional opportunities for this unique partnership to serve the city of Alexandria.

Concentrated campaign to recruit Commission members

Two initiatives dominate the support of the AAC for Alexandria Archaeology – the substantial waterfront discoveries over the past six years and the city-wide emphasis on telling the African American story in Alexandria.

While these areas of focus dominate our support, the AAC membership lacks the representation of the African American community. This will be a central focus of FY22.

The Commission strongly believes that the return of the Hotel Indigo Ship, the story of the thousands of timbers and other artifacts that have their own story to tell, represent a tourist,

economic, and business moment that resulted in filling the Visit Alexandria seat on the Commission. We are delighted that the position has been filled with Rebecca Doser, Communications Manager at Visit Alexandria.

Creation of an additional award

In the Commission's increasing outreach to the community, members of the Community Engagement Committee (Jake Hoogland and Dylan Colligan) proposed an additional award be authorized by the Commission in recognition of those who support and advocate for Archaeology. Annually the AAC, in conjunction with AA, present the **Ben Brenman Awards** to those individuals or organizations that have demonstrated exceptional involvement with city history; however, due to pandemic precautions, the AAC did not give out these awards in 2020, but will again during Archaeology Month in October 2021.

Supports of Note

Appreciation of Budget support for Staff Position and the Waterfront Museum Feasibility Study

One of AAC's key objectives has been to advocate for the Alexandria Archaeology staffing needs, a critical goal given their increasing workload with the substantial waterfront discoveries, challenges with the pandemic, and amazing creativity and ability to maintain significant community and education programming.

AAC sincerely appreciates City Council approval of the requested full-time Archaeologist employee position for two years and the funding of the Waterfront Museum Feasibility Study. Please note, however, the Commission will continue to advocate for this employee position to be changed to permanent full time going forward.

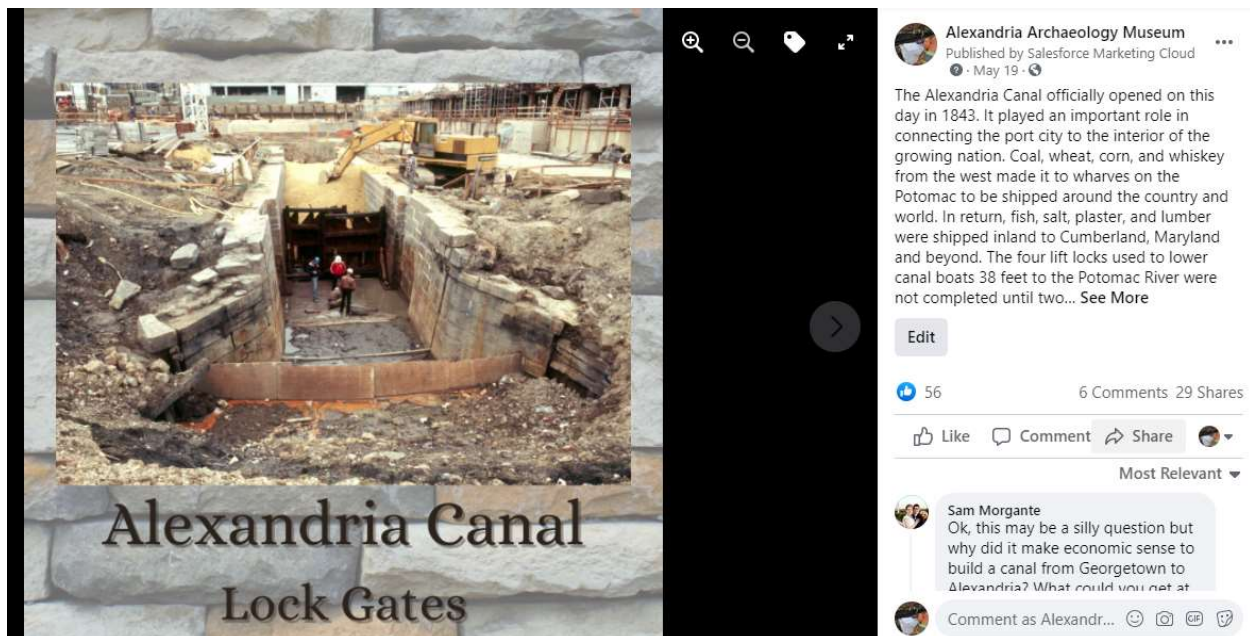
In addition, to fully achieve archaeology's education mission, the AAC will continue to request funding to change the Museum Education Specialist position to full-time. In the past two years, the part-time Museum Education Specialist created and provided more than 64 Ship Science lessons to Alexandria students and educators. We predict demand will for these STEM-based history lessons will continue.

Recognition of the Social Media Work by AA during Pandemic

AAC would be remiss if we did not, again, take this opportunity to acknowledge and advocate for the social media efforts of AA. Alexandria Archaeology has stepped up its social media presence in the past few years. This became even more critical with Virginia's Stay at Home Order/COVID-19 precautions as Alexandria City Public Schools and others shifted to virtual learning and the museum was closed at times or open only on a limited basis to visitors and volunteers.

Across all platforms – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram – Alexandria Archaeology has 7,373 followers/likes, with an average **engagement increase of 67% across platforms compared to last year**. The #WaterfrontWednesday series has become a staple.

The most popular Facebook post this year, highlighting the Alexandria Canal (from May 2021), reached nearly 6,000 people. This post briefly discussed the history and archaeological investigation of canal lift lock no.1. It also provided visitors with a link to a brochure from our website containing more information about the canal. This post shows the enduring interest in archaeological sites, even ones excavated over 30 years ago.



AA staff have continued their support of OHA's social media. The most notable change in the last year was the addition of regular video content added to AA's YouTube account, including videos about the archaeological process, the City's protection code, recordings of lectures, and educational content. These videos were watched a combined 4,387 times over the course of the year. The most popular video was a reading of, "Archaeologists Dig for Clues," which had 1,044 views by the end of the year.

COMMISSION MEMBER ACTIVITIES

AAC members have followed, advised, and participated in multiple aspects within Alexandria that focus on the city's history. Most notable in FY2021 include:

- Monitored progress of the **waterfront plan** via our participation on the Waterfront Commission and the **waterfront public art process**. Represented, as a member of the **Waterfront Commission**, the voice of archaeology and history on the waterfront and the plan/justification for the Waterfront Museum Feasibility Study.
- Supported the implementation of the **Fort Ward Interpretive Plan**.
- Successfully nominated the **Contrabands and Freedmen Cemetery Memorial to the National Park Service's African American Civil Rights Network**.
- Followed and advised on the Section 106 process for the **Ramsey Homes** redevelopment project and the mitigation strategies.
- Commission member Elizabeth Vehmeyer attended a virtual session of the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions Training done for Alexandria's Board of

Architectural Review in May 2020. Chair, Ivy Whitlatch also listened in to the presentations.

- Spearheaded the efforts of an ad hoc committee on launching the first length of the **African American Waterfront Heritage Trail** and are continuing to develop the southern route.
- Volunteered a total of 250 hours in its commitment to review, advise, and advocate to Council for the many important occurrences of archaeological discovery and areas of historic importance throughout the city of Alexandria.
- Responded to local story about ‘bottle hunting in privies’ with attached letter to the Editor of Zebra publication in October 2020.
- Continued representation on the Historic Alexandria Resource Commission focusing primarily on the Advocacy Committee.

GOALS FOR THE FUTURE

The goals of the AAC for the future, at the time of this report, while recovery from the impacts of the pandemic is still unknown, can best be summed up as we did in 2019-2020 – we are open and ready to be a partner with the City in navigating the upcoming challenges and opportunities regarding:

- Successful collaboration on and implementation of the budget approved Waterfront History Museum Feasibility Study.
- Continued advocacy for representation in the TFAC Vibrancy Plan so that Alexandria Archaeology remains a key partner with as much influence and impact as the Artists.
- Preparation for a briefing session with new and existing City Council members on the activities, goals, and issues surrounding AA.
- Continued interpretation of the African American story of Alexandria through the support of initiatives like Freedom House, additions to the AACRN, and other sites, projects, and collaborations.
- Support for innovative solutions for the storage that is increasingly reaching capacity, exhibition, conservation, and accessibility of maritime and other artifacts. Specifically, the AAC looks forward to supporting public education and outreach efforts during the process of transferring the timbers from the three ships found at Robinson Terminal South to Ben Brenman Pond for medium-term storage.
- Support for the continued leadership, staffing, and professional development of AA, including education, museum upgrade, and lab facilities to remain one of the country’s leading archaeology programs.
- Continue to advocate for a sustainable budget in support of a viable archaeological program for the city and seek new funding sources to support the work of the program.
- Recruit membership to the Commission to fill vacancies.

LEADERSHIP AND CURRENT AAC MEMBERSHIP/TENURE

The Commission elected officers in September 2020. Ivy Whitlatch was elected as Chair, Esther White as Vice Chair, and Ann Davin as Secretary.

Two new members were appointed (Christopher Warren and Rebecca Doser) during the year and three members resigned (Janice Magnuson, Ann Davin, and Mark Ludlow).

While there *are three general public vacancies on the Commission that require attention (one representative from Planning District III and two Members at Large)*, the Commission is actively seeking representation from the Society for the Preservation of Black Heritage (and is currently exploring ways to change that designation to the broader coalitions of Alexandria African American historical organizations/persons if necessary). As noted in our key accomplishments, AAC is pleased to have filled the Visit Alexandria seat with Rebecca Doser and the Alexandria Historic Society with Christopher Warren .

Chair	Ivy Whitlatch	Planning District I Rep	December 2022
Vice Chair	Esther White	Planning District II Rep	December 2021
Secretary	VACANT		
Members	Ralph Rosenbaum	Member at Large	January 2025
	Seth Tinkham	Historic Alexandria Foundation Rep	April 2025
	Jacob Hoogland	Member at Large	September 2021
	Richard Owens	FOAA Rep	April 2022
	Dylan Colligan	Area Business Community Rep	September 2022
	Edward Pulliam	Alexandria Association Rep	March 2023
	Elizabeth Vehmeyer	Member at Large	December 2023
	Christopher Warren	Alexandria Historic Society Rep	March 2025
	Rebecca Doser	Visit Alexandria Rep	April 2025

Eleanor Breen, City Archaeologist, acted as the staff liaison to the AAC during the course of the year.

ATTACHMENTS



Alexandria Archaeological Commission
America's First Archaeological Commission



April 14, 2021

Mr. Mark Jinks
City Manager
Alexandria City Hall
301 King Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Mr. Jinks,

It is with profound appreciation that the Alexandria Archaeological Commission and the Friends of Alexandria Archaeology support the City's inclusion of the OHA Waterfront Museum Feasibility Study in the FY 2022 budget. This is an initiative we have eagerly awaited, as we noted in our budget support in 2019 for FY 2020 and look forward to providing any assistance or counsel necessary.

'Alexandria Archeological Commission and staff have analyzed the challenge(s) facing the City with the conservation, interpretation, storage, and exhibition of the thousands of artifacts and timbers from the waterfront discoveries. Known as the Ship Committee, the group has presented five recommendations to the Commission with the need for a feasibility study one of the most pressing. We request \$125,000 to contract for a professional assessment to develop a unique concept to exhibit and interpret Alexandria's archaeological history, including the ships, potentially African American sites, and role in development. Included in this assessment would be the options for private/public partnerships, community/stakeholder input and review and the development of research and analytical program to build context and strengthen the City's narratives.'

We also have noted and support the OHA Department changes to City services in the FY 2022 budget, specifically the FY 2022 budget increase of a 0.75 part time Archaeologist position to a 1.00 full time employee position. Currently, this position is funded by a certified Local Government Grant until FY 2024 and has no impact on the General Fund. Making this a full-time permanent position after FY 2024 is critical. The position is essential for meeting the growing workload that the department faces, including the preservation and historic interpretation of waterfront discoveries and the City's increasing concentration on African American stories yet to be told from such sites as the Freedom House.

Lastly, we request that the FY 2021 budget maintain the \$50,000 contingency fund for Alexandria Archeology to continue to meet unexpected needs for conservation, documentation, and research.

*Alexandria Archaeology Museum, 105 North Union Street, #327, Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3217
Phone: 703/746-4399*

As heads of two of many citizen organizations supporting the tremendous and valuable work of the Alexandria Archaeology Department and historic preservation in our city, we also acknowledge the financial challenges facing City management. We are grateful for your foresight in budgeting for the opportunities Archaeology's work will bring to Alexandria for residents, visitors, scholars, and businesses.

Sincerely,



Ivy E. Whitlatch
Chair, Alexandria Archaeology Commission

CEHines

Christine E. Hines
President, Friends of Alexandria Archaeology

jeb



Alexandria Archaeological Commission
America's First Archaeological Commission



December 28, 2020

Dear Mayor Wilson and Members of City Council,

As Chair of the Alexandria Archaeological Commission (AAC), I am reaching out to provide our input on the Torpedo Factory Art Center Action Plan for Vibrancy and Sustainability. We applaud City Council and City Staff's dedication to the future of this unique gem and a source of great pride for Alexandria. We would like to thank Diane Ruggiero and Brett Johnson for their time and efforts to engage the public with the details of this plan, including accepting our invitation to present at our November Archaeological Commission meeting.

Our initial input on the current draft plan includes the following three points.

1. Any plan for revitalizing the Torpedo Factory should recognize the *historical* significance of the building as a key element of the plan. We support future efforts to preserve and interpret the historic character and evolution of the Torpedo Factory building and continue to tell its history – including and highlighting its African American history, its development into the unique Arts Center it is today, and Alexandria's role in our national defense decades ago.
2. The Torpedo Factory houses the Alexandria Archaeology Museum and the Archaeology division. The museum contributes to the vibrancy of the Torpedo Factory by increasing visitation and telling the story of Alexandria to visitors of all ages. The plan should *recognize Archaeology* and the role they play in future revitalization efforts.
3. The original vision of the Torpedo Factory was "*Artists at Work, Archaeologists at Work*." We want to continue to expand that concept and the exhibition and volunteer opportunities it presents. Since the museum was established in 1984 and even before that, the partnership of artists at work and archaeologists at work has resulted in unique collaborations and experiences for residents and visitors.

In closing, we continue to have one request, as stated at the City Council meeting in 2018 when this initiative was discussed. As a division of the Office of Historic Alexandria, Alexandria Archaeology is an integral part of the historic preservation of the city and the Torpedo Factory. For this reason, we ask that as the planning moves forward on the Vibrancy and Sustainability Plan for the Arts Center, a member of the Alexandria Archaeology Commission be considered as a primary stakeholder in the process. We only see an exciting future for Archaeology in Alexandria and the future of the Torpedo Factory is part of the excitement.

Alexandria Archaeology Museum, 105 North Union Street, #327, Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3217
Phone: 703/46-6399



Alexandria Archaeological Commission
America's First Archaeological Commission



Thank you for considering our input on the Action Plan.

Sincerely,

Ivy E. Whitlatch

Ivy Whitlatch
Chair, Alexandria Archaeological Commission

Cc: Gretchen Bulova, Director, Office of Historic Alexandria
Eleanor Breen, City Archaeologist, Office of Historic Alexandria
Diane Ruggiero, Deputy Director, Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities, Office of the Arts